

# THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

*This bulletin is published for readers at home and abroad by the Religions Division of the Ministry of Information, London, to elucidate the spiritual issues at stake in the war, and to provide information concerning the British Churches in wartime, as well as their contribution to post-war reconstruction.*

Number 246

July 20th, 1944

## "JAPAN, THE LAND OF THE GODS AND CHRISTIANITY"

### JAPANESE ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE NATIONALISTIC MYTHS WITH CHRISTIAN REVELATION

We are devoting this number of *Spiritual Issues* to a summary of a curious but sincere book by Takeda Kohei, a Japanese Christian who is clearly aware of the clash between the Shintoist myths, on which Japanese State worship is based, and the teaching of Christianity.

This clash arises on the doctrinal side—where it is difficult to square Christian teaching on Monotheism and a unique revelation with the Japanese belief in the story of the Sun-Goddess—and also on the ethical side, where the Japanese conception of their own nation as the Eastern *herren-volk* clashes with the Christian idea of the universal Family of God.

#### "The Country of the Gods"

The writer deals with the relation between the Emperor, whom he repeatedly refers to as "manifest deity," and the God of the Universe in whom he believes as a Christian. The following paragraph shows his attempt at a synthesis:—

"Is there any contradiction between regarding the Emperor as manifest deity in this sense, and believing (besides the Emperor) in God the Spirit, Creator and Preserver of Heaven and Earth? There is certainly neither conflict nor contradiction. This is because the feeling of the Japanese people that the Emperor as manifest deity is sacred and inviolable arises from the fact that the Emperor is directly descended from the

ancestral Sun-Goddess, the Foundress of our country. No feeling of sacredness ought to arise over a president elected by the will of the people. Even in a monarchy with a frequently changing royal family, when a temporary King is crowned, it is not difficult to imagine that the feeling towards that King is something entirely different to the reverence in which we hold the Emperor whose Imperial line has been unbroken for endless ages. The sacredness of our Emperor is derived from this unbroken continuity of the Imperial family through all ages. This is something not determined by human convenience, contract, or will, but is indeed a Heaven-sent authority. It is impossible and meaningless for anyone to desire such a position except the personality who is born for such a rank. In this fact lies the fundamental reason for the sacredness of the Emperor. In other words, the manifest deity of the Emperor lies in His sacredness, which is derived from the direct descent from the Sun-Goddess. For the Christian, when he believes in the unseen God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, besides the Emperor, does his feeling towards the Emperor change? No change ought to arise. It cannot arise, for His Imperial Majesty's direct descent from the Sun-Goddess is a strictly historical fact, and though besides the Emperor he believes in God the Spirit, the sacredness of the Emperor is not thereby injured (violated) in the slightest degree."

*Distributed by*

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*An Agency of the British Government*

**30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.**



The author gives the illustration of Mount Fuji crowned with the blue sky. Mountain and sky, he says, are not to be compared or contrasted. The Emperor and God are both unique in their own ways.

The position of the Emperor *vis-a-vis* the Eternal God is explained by equating a Japanese Deity, *Ananominakanushi no Kami*, with the Christian Creator of the Universe. This divine ruler is said to have instructed two other Gods to produce the Sun-Goddess, who in turn became the ancestress of the Emperor of Japan.

With regard to the infallibility of the Emperor, the writer states:

"Mankind has not yet grown out of its childhood, therefore it is necessary to have someone who represents the will of God. That is the ruler; for us Japanese it is the Emperor. Hence, we believe that the command of the Emperor is the command of God."

The writer makes an interesting comparison between the Bible and the Imperial Rescript on Education, deducing that the Bible is the Japanese Christian's guide to belief and the Rescript (a strongly totalitarian document) the guide to action.

The book deals at length with the ancient myth according to which Japan was marked out as the "Country of the Gods founded by Divine Will." The author believes in this unconditionally:

"We do not believe it because we can prove it; we believe it unconditionally, uncritically, nay instinctively: for it is not such a belief as should require proof. It cannot be proved by reasoning. We can take the attitude that it is just something that we ought to believe. As a matter of fact most of our people will acknowledge that this belief is something instinctively born in all Japanese, inherited with their blood from their ancestors."

The writer is aware of the historical problems raised by the myth, and deals with these by interpreting the myths somewhat after the manner of liberal interpretations of Old Testament stories.

### The National Constitution

The book contains a full exposition of the political philosophy on which the Japanese National Constitution is based. This lays great stress on the unbroken line of Imperial succession. "The Imperial Throne is a Heavenly gift: it cannot be gained by human merit or virtue. Only the august personality who is born as Emperor can become Emperor. Therein lies the Imperial sanctity.

"The Imperial Throne is thus bestowed by Heaven. Wherefore it is something absolute, eternally unchangeable. The day may come when the monarchies of the world will all become republics, but the day when Japan becomes a republic will absolutely never come to pass."

Great stress is laid on the phrase "The Emperor is the State." There is a very vigorous explanation of belief in the Emperor as the embodiment of the national life. This is carried forward into an exposition of "The divine virtues of the Emperor" and a eulogistic interpretation of the Imperial character and attitude follows. The section concludes:—

"What a gracious benevolent heart! The Japanese people, moved by such Imperial virtues, count it their highest glory and honor to have such an august personality as Ruler and are ready to offer up everything for the sake of Emperor and render Him service. This is Imperial Rule. This is the characteristic of our National Constitution, our boast before the whole world."

### The Japanese Spirit and Christianity

In the chapter on this subject, the author handles the same problem as the "German Christians" have handled repeatedly. He is trying to find a meeting-point between the passionate, nationalistic patriotism of the Japanese and the belief in universal brotherhood which belongs to the Christian. The following is a typical passage on the attempted synthesis:—

"About 17 years ago the principal of an elementary school in a certain city where I lived said to me: 'I dislike Christianity for the reason that it is always talking about righteousness.' The highest duty is to follow righteousness, 'but if righteousness is placed first a country will never stand.' I was young then and just dismissed his words as the delusions of a bigot, but now I come to think of them, they strike me as typical of Japanese thinking generally. In other words the principal said: 'Isn't the Christian's patriotism a love for righteousness rather than an unconditional love for the Japanese nation?'"

"But is not such thinking on the contrary an insult to the Japanese nation? For I believe that Japan is a nation based on righteousness. Ever since its foundation right down to the present day it has constantly practiced righteousness and henceforth as the performer of righteousness it will take its position among the nations.



"If we think of righteousness as an abstract concept like the idealism of youth, there may have been things, in the international conduct of Japan, not conformable with righteousness, but measured by the stern realities of the world, there is no country the equal of Japan in its adherence to righteousness in its international relationships. As long as Japan knows a thing to be unrighteous it is not possible to incline the country to carry it through. If there is anyone who thinks that the placing of righteousness first will hinder the advancement of our country, that very person, I believe, commits an error against the country. 'Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.' The country based on righteousness flourishes; the country that transgresses righteousness will finally perish. This is the immovable conviction of Christians, wherefore the Christian cannot obey the command of anyone, knowing it to be unrighteous. Herein lies the value of a Christian. I believe that, as Japan is a country based on righteousness, it is impossible for her to commit any national action that is a transgression of righteousness."

The following paragraph is illuminating on the course to be followed if a conflict should arise between loyalty to the Emperor and loyalty to God:—

"The question as to which should be followed if the claims of both conflict may arise as an intellectual pastime, but as a practical problem there is no need to worry about it. It is absolutely impossible to conceive that the Emperor should demand of the people anything unrighteous. Such a thing could not be."

This section concludes with an attempted synthesis between the Japanese belief in their own land as "The country of the Gods" and the Christian conception of the Kingdom of God. The following paragraph is typical:—

"The Japanese people believe in the everlasting existence of the Japanese state, regarding its development and prosperity as their highest aim and being ready to offer up their lives for its sake. Thus they are conscious of the state as an ultimate object. According to the Bible, however, the final goal of mankind is the supernatural thing called the Kingdom of God, so the state is one stage of the process towards the realization of the Kingdom of God. As far as the people who believe in the everlasting existence of the Japanese nation are concerned, the idea that the state is a stage of the pro-

cess until the highest object is realized may appear to be an unacceptable fancy. The relation of the state and the Kingdom of God, however, as taught by the Bible, is like the previously discussed relation of the Emperor and the God of Heaven and Earth. They do not stand in any relationship of opposition or rivalry. To hold them as two separate entities is not to commit a wrong against either."

### The Japanese World Mission

In the chapter on this subject the writer has to handle his biggest problem, viz. to harmonize the Christian belief in a universal kingdom with Japan's World Mission understood in terms of current political thought. He begins by a quite orthodox and intelligent exposition of the Kingdom of God as taught in the Gospels. This leads him to the conclusion that only true faith in God "can teach men true equality and make them desire a world that is ruled by true righteousness and justice."

The argument proceeds:—

"It is clear therefore wherein lies the world mission of Japan. The world mission of the Japanese Empire lies in promoting the establishment of a spiritual civilization which fears and worships God. But it may be asked—Has not Japan already accomplished this in the past? We do not hesitate to reply—Of course she has. The 2,600 years of Japanese history are from start to finish, through and through, the history of the furtherance of spiritual civilization. It is not a matter of regret that Japan did not awaken early to colonial expansion like England, Holland and France. There is no need to resent the fact that before the Meiji Era there were no great scientific inventions in Japan. If Japan, like England, Holland and France, had captured colonies early and excelled in scientific civilization, Japan might also, like these countries, have become materialistic. But fortunately Heaven did not bestow such blessings on Japan. It was not the world mission of Japan to dispute with England, Holland and France the possession and amount of material resources. We now know that the mission of Japan lay in propagating and founding in the world a spiritual civilization which fears and worships God. . . .

"But more than anywhere else the religious spirit of the Japanese people is revealed in their belief concerning the state, that is, the belief that Japan is the land of the Gods. Japan is a country fashioned by the Gods



and it is the mission of the Japanese people to inherit the land bequeathed to them by the Gods and cause it to flourish. This is the conviction held by all Japanese people without exception. Therefore, it is absolutely impossible for Japan as a state to transgress against righteousness, for the national consciousness will not permit it. Indeed, there is no country like Japan that has maintained righteousness internationally. The religious spirit of the Japanese people, the spirit which fears God, repulses evil instinctively. Moreover, the Emperor is not only by lineage directly descended from the Imperial Ancestral Deities but in his august personality too, he realizes and embodies the great heart of his ancestral Gods and rules over his people; while his people serve him with adoration for the divine virtues and majesty of his imperial personality. Herein lies the sanctity of the Japanese state.

"How does it come about that Japan thus maintains a life of co-operation and harmony so peacefully and beautifully? It is definitely not by material power, nor yet by the authority of a powerful oligarchy. The peace and order and progress of the Japanese state is maintained by a feeling that resembles a religious spirit, possessed by a people who are attached to their ruler as a Father, and worship the Emperor as Manifest Deity. As this is so, Japan possesses the prestige of the country of the Gods, and while it is so, Japan will flourish eternally as the country of the Gods."

The following section may serve as a summary of the synthesis arrived at by our ingenious author:—

"Then what is the relation between the two (i.e. the Japanese world mission and the Kingdom of God.—Ed.). In a word the Japanese state is the living model of the Kingdom of God."

"In the event of God determining to save the world, we can conceive of Him taking two methods. One is the teaching of the principles of salvation, i.e. theoretical education. Another is the demonstration of an actual example of salvation, i.e. practical education. To realize this plan in one corner of the world, thereby stimulating mankind and then to extend it as a model to the whole world is an extremely natural process for God to adopt. The Jewish people were the chosen race, chosen to teach the theory (or principle) of world salvation. The Japanese people are the race chosen to supply to the world this model.

"The ideal political structure for mankind is certainly not a democracy based on principles of humanism, for therein will be found only the clash of authority. Nor does the ideal structure consist in the rule of a despot or the tyranny of an oligarchy, for that does not enjoy the esteem of the people. The ideal political structure is found in a country like Japan with a monarchical government of an Emperor who rules the country according to the will of God (the Gods). Only such a state can win the spontaneous obedience and following of the whole people. It is only on this principle that the great ideal of the world as one family can be expected to be realized. How can the world be made one and live the life of a family in which each preserves his own individuality?

"Japan exists to teach the answer to this and to speed this belief throughout the world. Here indeed lies Japan's universal mission. If among our readers there is anyone who harbors any doubts that the realization of the world as one family bound together by reverence for God is the national mission of Japan and the spirit of the foundation of the country, I hope he will read once more the Imperial Rescript of the Emperor Jimmu at the time of His Accession to the Throne—'Above, we shall respond to the virtues of the Heavenly Gods—who have bestowed the country upon us; below, among the people we shall extend the spirit which fosters righteousness. Whereafter does it not behoove us to build the house covering the eight corners, opening up the capital and extending over the world.'"

In fairness to the author, it must be stated that the book concludes with a chapter on "The Christianity which perfects Japan's Universal Mission." In this section the writer endeavors to convince his readers that Christianity has a unique mission in Japan, namely, that of giving to the Japanese moral inspiration. Taken as a whole, the Christianity which he has offered to his readers is a syncretistic version of the faith, rather similar to certain gnostic systems of early Christian times. Two things stand out clearly from the whole book:—(1) The close similarity between the interpretation of Christianity given by this Japanese Christian, and that espoused by "German Christians" of the Nazi or semi-Nazi type. (2) The incompatibility between the honest acceptance both of Christian teaching and of the philosophy of Japanese nationalism accepted by representatives of the Eastern *herrenvolk*.